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ABSTRACT

An interdisciplinary career-oriented humanities major at Tougaloo College, which is designed to assist students to develop career interests within the context of humanistic inquiry, is described. Additionally, the program is designed to provide for in-depth and advanced study in one humanistic discipline and to stimulate intensive examination of contemporary ethical problems. The degree program consists of three basic components: general education and basic studies, humanities courses, and career electives. The humanities major requirements consist of four interdisciplinary courses totaling 12 semester hours and five courses in one humanistic discipline, such as English, art, music, or journalism. Students are required to conduct unit projects dealing with ideas of the unit and may include performing plays, music, or dances; reading portions of works; or composing original works and essays. A seminar on contemporary ethical issues is an exploration of ethical issues faced by career practitioners in several areas. A typical seminar has dealt with biomedical problems, problems in business and commerce, and problems in law and politics. Independent study allows students to research a problem within their chosen career area and defend it before the faculty. Students also must take five upper-level courses in one humanistic discipline and a course in music, art, dance, or creative writing. Career internships and on-the-job experiences are also possible options. (SW)

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An Interdisciplinary Career-Oriented Humanities Major

Ben E. Bailey

Tougaloo College

Tougaloo College is attempting to relate the humanities to career education through implementation of an interdsiciplinary career-oriented humanities major (ICOHM) which intends to meet the needs of the student who has broad interest in the humanities by assisting him to develop career interests within the context of humanistic inquiry. Such a student should not only be prepared for graduate and professional study upon graduating from the college, but should also be prepared for direct entrance into a career if such is his choice. The program will expose the student to methods of humanistic and interdisciplinary inquiry, provide for in-depth and advanced study in one humanistic discipline, stimulate intensive examination of contemporary ethical problems, and allow for carefully guided career planning and preparation. As a consequence, it is hoped that the student will relate the liberal arts, especially the humanities, to his professional and career preparation in such a manner that the attitudes, values, and skills promoted by each will reinforce those promoted by the other.

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Background

From the time of the completion of an evaluative self-study in 1968 as required by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges, Tougaloo College faculty and students discussed the need for more broadly-based interdisciplinary programs of study.

This need was also cited by the Southern Regional Board when it stated

> In curriculum organization, the Negro colleges show a ... lack of experimentation. Few attempts are made to develop course which cross disciplinary or departmental lines, to encourage independent study programs, to infuse non-Western materials into the basic courses.[1]

It was felt that at Tougaloo the humanities formed a logical group of subjects for an interdisciplinary major since they lend themselves readily to flexible approaches of teaching and learning and they touch upon every conceivable human problem or situation. Uncertainty that specialization in traditional disciplines of limited scope is adequate career preparation, and what some viewed as a decline in ethical standards in public and private life were also factors in the decision to design the interdisciplinary program.

The faculty also felt that today's college graduate is likely to pursue several radically different careers during his working life, or that the skills required in his job are almost certain to change in their entirety before his retires from the work force. The world of work is changing at such a rapid pace that jobs and careers which exist today may be obsolete tomorrow. Consequently, more and more employers seek persons with a broad range of intellectual skills including the abilities to communicate effectively, locate and use information, manipulate ideas and apply principles, analyze problems and situations, and to propose and test hypotheses. James O'Toole in discussing

education and employment makes the point that employers seek employees who have the adaptive intellectual skills developed by the liberal arts rather than job specific skills.[1] The faculty felt that ICOHM would help meet this demand. The faculty also felt that the program would help to educate persons who would have increased sensitivity to the ethical problems and conflicting values surrounding their careers.

The concept was approved by the faculty and subsequent planning and development grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities supported establishment of the program.

Aims of ICOHM

ICOHM aims to be a program of interdisciplinary studies culminating in a Bachelor of Arts degree within the broad area of the humanities while allowing for election of career-related courses and experiences. The program may serve to prepare students for graduate and professional study as well as to enter upon a career immediately after college.

Specific aims of the program are to:

1. stimulate reasoned examination of man's ideas, his various cultures, and his values
2. assist students to develop abilities to read and think analytically and critically
3. assist students to develop skills in humanistic research and to express their ideas clearly and effectively

4. stimulate students to express their aesthetic a creative natures through an art form

5. bring students to a realization of the interrelatedness of all human knowledge

6. assist student in acquring basic concepts and skills related to a broad area of career interest

7. assist students to develop techniques of examining ethical issues

Program Structure

The degree program consists of three basic components: general education and basic studies, humanities courses, and career electives.

A strong general education program required by the faculty for all Tougaloo degrees is basic to ICOHM. Comprising between fifty and sixty semester hours, the general education and basic studies core consists of courses in writing and speech, science and mathematics, a foreign language, history and social science, music or art, reading, library and study skills, and career planning.

The ICOHM courses (humanities major proper) consists of four interdisciplinary courses totaling twelve semester hours and five courses in one humanistic discipline such as English, art, music, or journalism as approved by the specific department. The entry level courses are Arts and Ideas I and II which are usually takken in the sophomore year. The courses are taught by a team including a philosopher, a musician, an artist, and a literary scholar. Although content and number of units change from year to year, a typical year has in cluded such units as

Exploration of the Beginning of Humanistic Thought and a Study of Folk Culture, Freedom and Oppression in the Medieval Period, Democracy and Authoritarianism: Ancient Greece and Egypt, Exploration and Discovery:The Renaissance, Religion and the Arts, Revolution: The Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries, and Conflicting Ideologies: Capitalism and Socialism. The courses intend to expose students to some of the major ideas which have shaped our world and to have them see how the arts and literature have either reflected these ideas or been a reaction to them.

Students are required to conduct unit projects dealing with ideas of the unit. Projects may include performing plays, music, or dances, reading portions of works, composing original works and essays, or any activity which demonstrates understanding and synthesis of one or more major ideas from the unit. Projects have not always been as creative and original as the faculty has wished. There has been a problem of communicating to the student that what is not wanted is not the usual term paper but a creative product which is supported by even more significant research than that usually demanded by a term paper.

Student evaluations of the course have been generally favorable; although, there have been reactions to the instructional team approach and to the nature of the term project. It is felt, however, that these reactions have come as a result of unfamiliarity causing some students to feel uneasy in a situation where the conditions do not allow them to predict with the certainty that they can in other courses.

A seminar, Contemporary Ethical Issues, is an exploration of ethical issues faced by career practitioners in several areas. A typical seminar has dealt with biomedical problems, problems in business and commerce, and problems in law and politics. Students explore the problems through guided research and discussion with persons currently engaged in careers. Several hypothetical problems are worked through using the Guided Design format developed by Professors Gene D'Amour and Charles Wales of the University of West Virginia. The procedure is one which demands that students as a group weigh choices and consider constraints in arriving at decisions for action.

Student response to the seminar has been overwhelmingly favorable. They have seen immediate relevance to their career plans and have even suggested that it should be a required general education course. A small number who have missed the point of the course complain that they have found no answers.

Independent Study is a follow-up to the seminar. The student will research a problem within his chosen career area, take a position, and defend it before the faculty. Again the attempt is to impress upon the student the reality of the hard choices which must be made. Essentially, the experience is a value clarification process and the student must come to see that his decisions are affected by his values.

In addition to the four interdisciplinary core courses, the student must take five upper-level courses in one humanistic discipline. This is to assure that the student has more than passing acquaintance with an area of the humanities and to assist him in developing in-depth perspective. The student's degree will be awarded in humanities and the related field, e.g.,

Humanities-Philosophy.

A course in music, art, dance, or creative writing must also be taken so that the student comes to some appreciation of the meaning of the aesthetic impulse and grasps some rudimentary understanding of what it is to create or perform.

Career Electives

In consultation with his advisor the student identifies an area of career interest and develops a flexible plan of elective courses and experiences throughout the college related to that interest. For example, a student in the recording business elects several music courses, a few business courses, a public relations course, and an internship in a recording studio. A student interested in business may elect Introduction to Business, Personnel Psychology, Accounting, Business Management and an internship in a local firm.

Career internships are available for those interested, and students are strongly encouraged to elect at least one. The student works for extended periods each week with a local organization where develops selected skills related to his interests, assesses the role of the career area in society, and examines values and ethical problems associated with the career area. It is also hoped that employers will come to realize through having such a student that the liberal arts are relevant to careers.

Students may also elect to earn a maximum of six hours for on-the-job experiences through the Cooperative Education Program. This will be especially encouraged when the student expects to seek employment upon graduation. In the final report on the cooperative experience, the student must explore the role of ethical values in the career area.

Evaluation of the Program

Outside evaluators have found the concept an intriguing and feasible one and seem to feel that it is a useful way by which liberal arts colleges may address the career interests of their students. The concern with ethics in career areas, which is a thread througjout the whole program, has also been commended. Some concern has been voiced, however, that too little attention is given to non-Western cultures in the Arts and Ideas courses and that there should be a stronger relationship among courses in the core (Arts and Ideas I and II, Contemporary Ethical Issues, and Independent Study).

Students who have taken individual courses have generally found them enriching and valuable additions to the curriculum. Many of these were not ICOHM majors. In fact, the program has not attracted majors in the numbers predicted. Feelings are that many students are still skeptical and that once we have produced significant numbers of graduates this skepticism will be dispelled. Another is that many of the students are conservative and tend to shun the new and innovative chhosing the more traditional

curricula as safer. Those students who have chosen ICOHM, however, seem to be the more adventurous, creative students whose interests are wide ranging and are not likely to be met by the more traditional programs.

The faculty of the college remains convinced that ICOHM is an acceptable alternative to the traditional program and that despite its inability to attract large numbers of students, it is a way of addressing two very real concerns - career education and humanities education.

Ben E. Bailey, Chairman
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NOTES

1 The Negro and Higher Education in the South (Southern Regional Education Board, August 1976), p. 5.

2 James O'Toole, "The Reserve Army of the Underemployed: The Role of Education," Change, VII, No. 5 (June 1975), p. 30.